



U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement

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# News Release

## **TWO MEN PLEAD GUILTY TO SMUGGLING ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS RESULTING IN TWO DEATHS**

DENVER – Two men pleaded guilty today to transporting aliens unlawfully present in the United States for financial gain which resulted in two deaths, announced Bill Leone, acting U.S. Attorney for the District of Colorado, and Jeffrey Copp, special agent-in-charge of the Denver office of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Jose Angel Crispin-Diaz and Leonardo Cordova-Perez made their pleas before U.S. District Court Judge Walker D. Miller.

According to the plea agreement, both defendants are illegal immigrants who separately traveled from their homeland in Mexico to the U.S. in March. Cordova-Perez paid a smuggler to get him into the United States. Once in the U.S., the smuggler asked him to drive a truck containing illegal immigrants to Florida, Arkansas, and Alabama.

Cordova-Perez also agreed to collect money from the families of the smuggled aliens once he dropped them off at their destinations. The smuggler gave him \$499 to pay for gasoline, and a list of passengers who were to make the trip. By agreeing to drive and collect the money, Cordova-Perez did not have to pay the smuggler \$600 that he still owed.

When Crispin-Diaz arrived in Phoenix, he agreed to assist Cordova-Perez driving the truck. He was going to be paid \$500 for driving. Both defendants knew that the passengers were illegally in the United States, and that it was illegal to drive them.

Cordova-Perez picked up 21 other illegal aliens March 11 and left Phoenix, Ariz., driving a 1991 white Chevrolet pickup truck. Fourteen people sat in the rear bed of the pickup truck inside a camper shell. Eight people sat up front in the cab area. Cordova-Perez drove into Colorado and changed places with Crispin-Diaz about 4 a.m., March 12.

The truck was involved in a one-vehicle rollover crash at 6:20 a.m., which occurred on U.S. Highway 160 eastbound, near the summit of Wolf Creek Pass. Colorado State Patrol (CSP) investigators later determined that the roads were dry and the weather was sunny with clear visibility. The CSP also determined that the truck was traveling at 75 miles per hour, but the advisory speed limit for the curve near the crash was only 30 miles per hour, with a posted speed limit of 45 miles per hour.

One passenger, Jonas Medina-Ovardo, died at the scene of the crash. Another passenger, Carmelo Luna-Guzman was flown to St. Mary's Hospital in Grand Junction, Colo., where he died the next day from his injuries. The remaining passengers were taken to area hospitals or flown to Swedish Hospital in Denver or San Juan Regional Medical Center in Farmington, N.M.

“Human smugglers repeatedly demonstrate their total disregard for human life,” said Jeffrey Copp, special agent-in-charge of the Denver Office of Investigations with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). “This case is all-too typical. Two people died because smugglers tried maximize their profits by cramming 22 unsuspecting aliens into a pickup truck.”

Further investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement special agents determined that the passengers paid between \$1,100 and \$1,800 to be driven within the United States.

Both defendants face any term of years up to life imprisonment. Judge Miller will determine the actual sentence July 22. Both remain in custody.

Special agents from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement investigated this case with assistance from the Colorado State Patrol. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Suneeta Hazra and James Candelaria, District of Colorado, are prosecuting the case.

# ICE #

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.*